

Creative Acts of Expression---Catalyzed in Circles

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I know, as so many of us who are fortunate to be in one know, how supportive a sacred circle can be--as an incubator-womb space in which the courage to be authentically ourselves leads to *creative acts of expression*. This may include what is usually meant by expressive arts—writing, painting, sculpture, dance, theater, films—or political and personal activism, transforming relationships to others, or changing institutions. Inevitably, perhaps because experiences of the sacred are so deep and deeply personal, creative acts of expression are expressions of awakening that begin with trusting our own feelings and perceptions, of realizing it is up to us to be real and act on the premise that what matters to us, really matters. This is soul knowledge that becomes soul work when we take steps to bring what we know into our personal world and into the world. At times of crisis, what we do — or not, can tilt a situation in either direction.

In the silence of undirected inner reflection, prayer, or meditation, which is an element in this kind of a circle, we tap into a center in ourselves that is also at the center of the circle. In Jung's psychology, this is the archetype of meaning, the Self. By meeting as a circle of women, we invite the sacred feminine to come into our midst. This form is archetypal. It connects us to suppressed sources of women's spiritual power, much as an aquifer lies below the surface until it is tapped into, bubbles up and flows. We tap into an awareness that goes back in time to when divinity was worshipped in many forms, as female, as the Great Mother, Gaia. In the last third of the twentieth century, Merlin Stone's *When God was a Woman* got archeological support from Marija Gimbutas and other archeologists who literally dug up evidence. Scrolls that had been hidden and preserved by the dryness in Egyptian caves near Nag Hammadi, were found in this same period. These became known as the *Gnostic Gospels* through Elaine Pagels. These early Christian writings were rich in metaphor and included Sophia, the Sacred Feminine. Gnostic churches were egalitarian rather than hierarchal in form, leadership was shared: who did what—the sermon, communion, greeting newcomers, could be chosen by lot. Everyone was welcome. Women served in all roles. Once the Church at Rome had the power to condemn heresy, the Gnostic Christians were persecuted, its gospels destroyed. Our only knowledge of them came from the church fathers, which systematically had destroyed all previous copies of these gospels. This time, it was different. Circumstances had changed. Through the influence of feminism and the women's movement, there now were women scholars in all fields including theology.

In the United States before the women's movement, women did not define themselves; men did--using religion as authority. "Women's spirituality" emerged after women spoke for themselves and about themselves. Only then, did we speak of what we experienced as sacred and what we knew to be spiritual information. This is *gnosis*, intuitively felt soul knowledge, it is what we recognize in the marrow of our bones, what our heart recognizes as true for us—and from this insight, true for other humans and for the planet. Sacred circles support trust in our own perceptions of divinity which can be felt as transcendent spirit or felt in embodied holy moments. This is empowering, especially for women who have been told that God is male, demands obedience, and that women since Eve are the source of evil, when her choice was knowledge of the difference between good and evil. Re-imagining God as other than and more than a male authority, will shake the foundation of patriarchy, which is historically based upon theology and hierarchy to justify having and using power over others. Monotheism has brought us fratricidal wars of religion in Europe during the Middle Ages as well as the current conflicts in the Middle East. Jew, Muslim, Christian — all descend from Abraham, and thus are brothers. Women's spirituality is in conflict

with monotheistic, Abrahamic beliefs based on words attributed to what prophetic men in ages past said God said.

Five women friends sitting around a round table began the women's suffrage movement in 1848, an effort that took seven decades for women to achieve, until women got the right to vote in 1920. Once accomplished, it became a non-issue. Of course women vote! This is what success looks like. This same pattern is seen in the economic and social gains for women by women in the late 1960s and 70s. In consciousness-raising groups, women learned about being stereotyped and stifled. Speaking truth to power emerged as a ringing intention, done through demonstrations, conferences, marches, legal suits, and personal confrontations. The idea of equal rights spread. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* was a starting point. Others wrote articles and essays, many were published in *Ms. Magazine* or in anthologies of women's writings. Women challenged the invisible assumptions of women's inferiority and the right of men and male institutions to limit access to education, professions and occupations. The consequences of sexism and the idea of equality brought about a huge cultural change in the United States and influenced the world. That gains are taken for granted is a measure of success. Young women now assume that they have opportunities and rights that women never have had as a gender before, and still do not in many parts of the world. Just like the right to vote, once the perceptions and voices of a critical number of empowered women are heard, what was radical and opposed becomes the new normal.

When I wrote *The Millionth Circle: How to Change Ourselves and The World* as a guide to women's circles in 1999, the mechanism through which women's circles with a spiritual center could bring about an end to patriarchy was based upon theoretical biologist Rupert Sheldrake's work on morphic fields and morphogenesis. The millionth circle like the allegorical hundredth monkey that inspired my title, was a metaphoric number. It was the final one to tip the scales, the one that added to all the rest formed a critical mass, after which a new idea or attitude or behavior becomes accepted. A recent example would be Global Warming, an idea that was resisted and even ridiculed, until almost overnight, a critical number of people accepted it. I was aware that it happened between the hardcover publication of *Urgent Message From Mother: Gather the Women, Save the World* in 2005 and the paperback edition in 2008. Also pivotal for me, was Malcolm Gladwell's *The Tipping Point* based on geometrical progression, another way of explaining how evolutionary ideas spread. It's how a virus spreads or a YouTube video goes viral. It's like how a snowball starts as the size of a baseball, gathers snow and momentum and as it rolls downhill could become an avalanche. It is what I sense is happening: there is momentum, circles form easier and easier, and the more there are, the easier it is and the less time it takes for more to form.

A circle with a spiritual center provides support for authentic acts of expression, to discern and commit to what I call your "assignment." Mine is about writing and speaking and spreading the word about circles and assignments. The current vehicle for my message is *Like a Tree: How Women, Trees, and Tree People Can Save the Planet*. I call upon mystical activists and Sacred Feminine feminists, the men and women I call "tree people" who feel deep connections to trees and the sacred world.

If you find yourself wanting to give back or make a difference and are drawn to the possibility, I suggest that you will recognize an assignment that is yours by three characteristics, by your answers to three questions that only you can answer: One: Is it meaningful — to you? Two: Will it be fun? If it draws upon your skills and experience, calls on your creativity and if you are in the company of people who share your values and commitment --it will be fun. And three: Is it motivated by love? In the first half of adult life, parenting can fit this description as can developing an innate talent that will require years of perseverance and discipline, or following a calling into a helping profession. Like Joseph

Campbell's "Follow your bliss." it does not mean that this will be easy, or that you will be successful or that others will understand. It is however, living your personal myth, which we do through the choices we make. Heed the Goethe quote that begins, "Whatever you can do or dream you can do, begin it now!"

Once you make a heart commitment to take up an assignment or sacred mission, a trustworthy circle provides spiritual and emotional support. In circle, what is meaningful is important. Prayers are requested. Gratitude expressed. Often a candle is placed in the center. With or without awareness, the sacred feminine is represented by it. For this is a symbol of Hestia the Greek Goddess of the Hearth and Temple, who was present in the fire at the center of a round hearth; her fire was the source of light, warmth and nourishment. In women's circles such as these, we are catalysts, witnesses, and midwives for each other's growth and path of individuation.

Meanwhile, the world is now in crisis—danger and opportunity exist side by side. There are more than 6.7 billion of us on the planet, doubling since 1960, adding about 78 million every year. For all the concern about sustainability and global warming, left out of the solution is the need for reproductive rights for all women, and universal education that includes girls. Conflicts that could escalate into nuclear warfare continue, while political leaders posture and threaten each other. Conflict resolution knowledge and women are notably not brought to the table, at a time when growing numbers of us and weapons of mass destruction could make this beautiful planet uninhabitable. Demonstrations for democracy and social justice, a resurgence of feminism, research support that humans are born good and that meditation changes brain patterns, and at the quantum physics level, we are all one suggest the potential for evolutionary change. It depends upon what we do. It would be fair to say that whether matters will get better or much worse will be decided in our lifetime.

I take to heart, the Dalai Lama's words at the Vancouver Peace conference in 2009, when he said that it is up to Western women to save the world. I'd expand "western" to mean everywoman anywhere who has been liberated by the women's movement to define herself by the choices she makes. Western women are the beneficiaries of education, responsibilities, authority, opportunities, democracy, medical advances, and reproductive choice that women have never had in history. As members of the female gender, women respond to stress differently than men, and have empathic, collaborative and communication abilities that to contribute to decision making and conflict resolution. When women's maternal concerns for their children extend to all children, when women have an equal say with men in making decisions at every level, when women's ability to look after others and budget limited resources is valued, then peace and a sustainable world will be possible

***Never doubt that small groups of committed women can change the world:
we did before, we can do it again!***

With love and hope,
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(1943 words)

Article written for Women of Spirit and Faith anthology: *Women, Spirituality and Transformative Leadership: Where Grace Meets Power*. Edited by Kay Lindahl. Kathe Schaaf, Kathleen Hurty, Rev. Guo Cheen, publisher: Skylight Paths Publishing, a division of Longhill Partners, Inc. Woodstock, VT. Pubdate in 2011-2012. Copyright Jean Shinoda Bolen, 2011, jeanbolen@gmail.com (www.jeanbolen.com) Permission granted to share this with others.